

Student-Led Parent Conferences



"At student-led conferences, you talk to your parents about all your work and grades and how to make them better. I think they're a lot better than having your teacher do all the talking."

- Student - Grade Eight

Student-led parent conferences increase parent involvement in schools. Research reveals that parent participation in conferences increases 40 to 60 percent when student-led conferences are implemented as opposed to traditional parent teacher conferences.

The Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC), a federally funded grant under Title V of No Child Left Behind, has assembled this resource to help students, parents and educators:

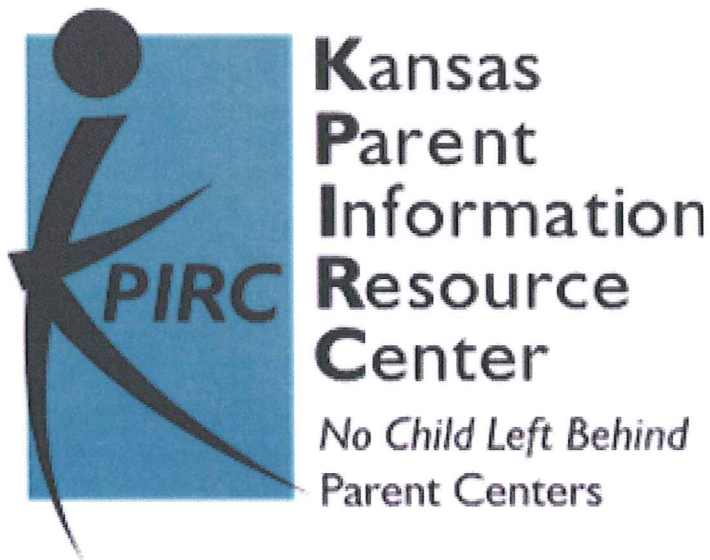
1. Increase parent involvement
2. Implement student-led parent conferences
3. Provide positive interactions between students, parents and educators.

This resource features an article written by a Kansas teacher and highlights her experience with student-led parent conferences.

We hope you find this resource helpful!!!! If you would like additional copies please contact us toll free at 866-711-6711 or you may download this at www.kpirc.org

Sincerely,

Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC)



Letting Students Lead Parent Conferences And Student Makes Three

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by **Laura Hayden** (Seventh grade communications teacher at Derby Middle School in Derby, Kansas)

As I walk around my classroom, I hear students explaining to their parents the purpose of assignments, what they learned, and why they achieved the grades they did. Some students speak with pride; some express regret.

As a middle school teacher, I'm thankful our school has made the transition to the student-led method of helping parents to learn how their child is performing in school. Student-led conferences are a refreshing change from the previous "herding" of parents through the school cafeteria, where they would wait in lines for a quick rundown of their child's grades. I often found it difficult to keep straight which parents came for which child.

Our principal introduced the concept of student-led conferences last year and asked for volunteer teams to try it out. One seventh- and one eighth-grade team ran their conferences this way in the fall. Those teams then reported their results to the staff at an inservice, providing helpful suggestions and handouts. In the spring, most teams were willing to try student-led conferences, and our principal helped by offering advice and materials. My team found the experience both enjoyable and valuable to all parties.

Format and Preparations

Students show parents some of their work and explain their grades at a student-led conference. But each team may conduct them slightly differently. For example, our team used an open house format in which students and parents visited all team members' classrooms, while others had their students hold the entire conference in one classroom. If students conduct the conference from just one room, it's important that parents know each team member is available to them.

The format is important, but I believe the success of a student-led conference is most determined by how well students are prepared. My preparation for conferences begins at the start of the school year, when I ask students to set up a binder to contain a portfolio and a section of graded work. I encourage them to keep these organized, reminding them frequently that they will be explaining their work to their parents at conference time.

About a week before conferences, our team sends home a letter giving parents dates and times. We explain that students must attend because they're conducting their own conferences. We also share a few positive comments we've received from parents about student-led conferences, such as:

- "We believe it gives responsibility to our son. We are able to ask him directly any question on any particular material. I believe this method gives him a feeling of participation and ownership."
- "This is a more precise and concise way to tell us what her problems are and what she's trying to accomplish than a traditional conference where the teacher generalizes."

About three days before conferences, I have students prepare portfolios of their work to date. In addition to a special project to share with their parents, they select a quiz, homework assignment, and one assignment from which they feel they learned the most. Students also complete a nine-week reflection on their grades and study habits for the portfolio. They set goals for the next nine weeks, and tidy up their graded work section.

A couple days before conferences, students write letters of invitation to parents. The day before conferences, we role-play how they can manage their conferences. I pretend to be the student, and they love to play the teacher or parent. I teach them how to handle a poor grade and what parents will want to know, and I give them a checklist of what to cover. Students also help prepare the room by dusting and setting up refreshments.

Procedures

Students begin the conference by introducing me to their parents. I welcome each family and make sure they know I'm available for questions. While the students conduct their conferences, I try to go by each table to make a quick statement about the student's strengths. I make sure a student has explained a point as best he or she can before I add to or clarify it. Sometimes I may have six or more families in the room, but I usually have time to visit a little while with each one.

Team members keep an eye out for each other so that we're ready to give support if one of us encounters a difficulty. Administrators also walk around and are available if we need help. Last year, our team ran a video of class projects; besides being another means for parents to see their child in the school environment, this helped to keep students' siblings occupied. We let parents know that if they need a private conference in addition to the one with their child, we will accommodate them.

If a parent can't come to the conference, the student takes his or her binder and a check-off form home and holds the conference there. The form has an area for parent responses. Administrators are also willing to confer with a child who is unable to get a parent to participate. Finally, I require all students to complete a post-conference reflection and we discuss how their conferences went.

Advantages

Students have told me they get yelled at less about their grades now that we have student-led conferences because they get a chance to explain their grades with others around. (Parents probably are pleased to see their child taking responsibility.) Students also have said they like hearing the positive comments teachers tell their parents.

I find student-led conferences valuable because discussing a child's progress with parents and child present together takes out the "she said, he said" of traditional parent-teacher conferences and allows us to focus on developing plans for improvement. At this point, I can't imagine going back to the previous way we met with parents. The preparatory time and work this alternative takes is worth it, especially when you hear a struggling student explaining what he or she learned from an assignment, and taking responsibility for the score he or she achieved.

Laura Hayden is a seventh-grade communications teacher at Derby Middle School in Derby, Kansas.

Student-Led Parent Conferences

1. *Why student led conferences?*

i) Student Benefits

- (a) Accountability for their learning
- (b) Students learn to evaluate their own progress
- (c) Students gain greater commitment to school work and learning
- (d) Builds self confidence and self esteem
- (e) Encourages student/parent communication
- (f) Builds communication and critical thinking skills
- (g) Places responsibility on the student and parent
- (h) Allows students to become actively involved

ii) Parent Benefits

- (a) Increases the amount of information given to the parents
- (b) Learn more about their student's learning and skills
- (c) An opportunity to help their student set positive goals
- (d) Active participant in their student's learning
- (e) First language communication
- (f) Eliminates standing in line waiting for conference

iii) Teacher Benefits

- (a) Less stress on teachers, very relaxed atmosphere
- (b) Less confrontational (more positive)
- (c) Places responsibility on the student and parent
- (d) Increased parent participation

2. *How to get ready.*

i) Be creative!

ii) Set Conference Schedule and General Format

(a) Design your conference format

1. List what you need and want to communicate to parents
2. What is the teacher's role?
3. Set the Agenda.
4. Write up a script or procedure sheet.

- iii) Teacher Preparation
 - (a) Collect and save samples of student work
 - (b) Students complete a pre-conference self evaluation
 - (c) Students set goals for next quarter/year
 - (d) Teacher prepares invitation to parents (can be done as a team)
 - (e) Set up stations (learning, activity, sharing) and room arrangements
 - (f) Guest book/Sign-up for follow-up teacher conferences
- iv) School Preparation
 - (a) Inform and invite parents
 - (b) Share ideas among teachers
- v) Student Preparation
 - (a) Discuss agenda and procedures ahead of time
 - (b) Discuss what students think their parents want to know
 - (c) Students scripts, evaluations, etc.
 - (d) Practice making introductions
 - (e) Role play – Practice conferencing with peers

3. Follow-up

- i) Post Conference Activities (evaluations, etc.)
- ii) No Shows (What can be done to approach 100% participation?)
- iii) Program Evaluation (PTSO Teacher response survey)

Some Guidelines for Selecting Student Work For Student Led Conferences

Student work should show:

- Multiple skills and processes
- Address state/local curriculum standards
- Emphasize process as well as quality of product
- Use examples of real work, not work contrived to “show”

Teacher Planning

- Plan ahead to teach content standards with activities that demonstrate multiple skills and processes
 - Design work pieces that will demonstrate identifiable skills and processes addressed in your curriculum
 - Set up a system for saving student work
 - Inform students early what they will be sharing their saved work with their parents at conference time
 - Be sure parents are well informed that student work will not be coming home and why
 - Keeping a portfolio will allow parents to come in any time and view student work if they want – Be sure to invite them to do this
 - Inform parents early in the year as to the new format and benefits
 - Help students evaluate their work and discover what the evidence tells them about who they are as learners
 - Have students complete “Self reflection” statements or make comments about their learning on the larger projects or unit
1. The focus on self reflection should be positive
 2. Students will need guidance and modeling to do this activity – it is not something they do naturally
 3. Don't overdo the use of self reflections

Final Selection of Work Pieces

- Teacher decides which specific work pieces he/she feels is a must
- Students select other work pieces given specific criteria by the teacher



Select something that demonstrates.....



Select your favorite.....



This piece shows my research skills because.....



This piece shows that I had to solve a problem by.....

- Teachers in the primary grades may want to put notes on various pieces to give parents some information
- A table of contents might be useful as the students organize and put the final portfolio together
- Make graphs showing performance on basic skills such as spelling or addition, subtraction, etc. This can tell more than a stack of work sheets or test papers.
- Limit the number of items in the final SLC Portfolio.

Suggested Reading: Student Led Conferences

Bernick, R., Rutherford, B., & Elliot, J. (1991). *School and Family Conferences in the Middle Grades. School and Family Partnership series.* Hampton, NH: RMC Research Corporation.

Countryman, L. L., & Schroeder, M. (1996) When Students Lead Parent-Teacher Conferences. *Educational Leadership*, 53(7), 64-68.

Guton, J.M., & Fielstein, L. L. (1989) Student-Led Conferences: A Model for Teaching Responsibility. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 24(2), 169-172.

Hackmann, D. G. (1996). Student-Led Conferences at the Middle Level: Promoting Student Responsibility. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80(578), 31-36.

Hackmann, D. G., Kenworthy, J., & Nibbelink, S. (1995, November). *Student-Lead Conferences: Encouraging Student-Parent Academic Discussions.* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Middle School Association, New Orleans, LA>

Hackmann, D. G., Kenworthy, J., & Nibbelink, S. (in press). Student Empowerment Through Student-Led Conferences. *Middle School Journal*.

Kinney, Pat, & et al. *A School-Wide Approach to Student-Led Conferences: A Practitioner's Guide.* National Middle School Association.

Little, A. W., & Allan, J. (1989). Student-Led-Parent Teacher Conferences. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 23(3), 210-218.

Paulson, F.L., & Paulson, P.R. (1994). *Student-Led Portfolio Conferences.*

Student-Led Conferences

Purpose

Student-led conferences spotlight the most important person in the process (the student); improve parent involvement; and bring students to the point where they ask their teachers, "How can I make my work better?" Student-led conferences put the students in charge, holding them responsible and accountable as they present their work to their parents. This type of conference is a natural progression in the quest for a Standards-based school.

After much study and discussion, student-led conferences should be implemented as the next step in linking parents, students, and the school. For the student, this type of conference is the ultimate performance event.

Preparation

Early and varied communication and planning are important for successful participation in the student-led conferences. Begin mailings to parents during the summer, before the start of the school year. In addition, give information in newsletters, in school announcements and telecasts, and during New-Student Orientation, Open House, and PTA meetings. Convey to parents and students that participation in student-led conferences is expected of all students and their parents.

Teachers should be involved with and informed of preparations and time lines. They must work with students from the beginning of the school year to prepare them for their student-led conferences. Discussion, role-play, and viewing videotaped conferences are all recommended tools to use with students.

Organization is extremely important in preparing for the conferences-both for teachers and students. Students should keep their schoolwork in organized folders or binders, one for each subject. Students are also required to complete a Self-Evaluation Form prior to the conference. On the form, students list each of their subjects, along with an explanation of how they feel they are progressing in each class and/or their opinion of the class. The explanations can be basic or detailed, but it is important that it be the students' views. They will then complete the section for their goals for the coming grading period. Each student will have a separate, student-led conference folder that will include the Self-Evaluation Sheet; Grade/Evaluation sheets (completed by their teachers for each subject); a piece of schoolwork selected by the student to share during the conference; and his/her *Agenda*.

Teachers must maintain folders, also, to include all major assignments with rubrics. It also is recommended that they have a benchmark piece to share with the parents, if needed. Prior to the conference, teachers must prepare a Grade Sheet or must complete the Teacher Evaluation Checklist for each student, to be included in the student's folder.

It is necessary to eliminate any barriers preventing parents from attending the student-led conference. Transportation, child care, and flexible conference times are all valid concerns for parents. For those parents needing transportation, schedule a bus to stop at designated locations on the day of the conference. Utilize parent volunteers and high school students to provide child care for young siblings. This also will provide the high school students with credit for required service-learning hours. Also, develop a conference schedule that allows parents to conference in the morning or evening hours, if needed.

When everyone is prepared, the student-led conference can be a meaningful dialogue between the student and his/her parent, resulting in an increased awareness for the parent of the academic expectations for his/her child and the level of progress that the student has attained. The student will be more confident in what he or she knows and is expected to know. Well-planned preparation also encourages students to be better organized. While completing the Self-Evaluation forms, students are required to thoughtfully take a look at their performance in each of their classes and to set goals for self-improvement.

The Conference

The student is the presenter. The student begins the conference by opening the Agenda and sharing his or her success with Performance Standards for that grade level. The student also shares a piece of work he/she has chosen and explains its rubric.

The parent is the audience. The parent asks probing questions of the student to get at Standards and quality student work.

The teacher is the timekeeper and facilitator. During the first half of the conference, the teacher observes and encourages the student to keep focused on the conference checklist, if necessary. During the last half of the conference, the teacher shares grade information and clarifies the parent's questions.

Once the student-led conferences are completed in the classroom, the parents are directed to the cafeteria to review all of their child's work at their leisure. All major assignments and unit tests should be included, along with rubrics. Certain projects can take the form of photographs, cassette tapes, etc.

While in the cafeteria, parents may talk with the guidance counselors and Youth Services Center Staff; obtain information on various activities, i.e., tutoring and support networks; or enroll students in Extended School Services (ESS).

Students

The Purpose of the Student-Led Conferences

The purpose student-led conferences are to provide you with the opportunity to share with your parents what you are learning in school. It also provides you the opportunity to share with your parents your educational goals and a piece of your work that makes you especially proud.

Steps to Student-Led Conferences/Student Responsibilities:

- Throughout the school year, keep your work and assignments organized in folders or binders.
- Be sure to complete the Student-Self Evaluation Conference Form.
- Turn your Conference Form in to your classroom teacher.
- Make sure you receive a confirmation time from your teacher, and give it to your parents.
- On the day before the conference, make sure your folders and notebooks are in order. All materials and your Agenda should be placed on your desk in homeroom before you leave school.
- Make sure you have chosen a piece of work to share with your parents.
- Think about areas in which you need to improve and areas in which you excel. Be prepared to share this information with your parents.
- Come to the conference with your parents.
- Use the Student Checklist to help guide you through your student-led conference. Be sure to check off each item as you complete it.
- After your student-led conference, take your parent to the cafeteria to visit with the counselors or to review other work in your notebooks and folders.

After the Conference:

- What could I do to improve my student-led conferences?
- Am I doing the best I can in all my classes?
- Do I need to attend Extended School Services (ESS) to raise a grade or to work on a skill?
- Am I using my Agenda effectively?

Parents

What to Expect at Student-Led Conferences:

- At a student-led conference, your child does most of the talking.
- Your child will tell you the Performance Standards he or she is working on in class.
- Your child will discuss with you his or her progress in each class.
- Your child will discuss with you his or her improvement plan for the upcoming grading period.
- After your child has finished, he or she will turn the meeting over to you and the teacher for any further questions that need to be answered.

Things to Do Before the Conference:

- Make sure the teacher has sent you a Confirmation Form. If you have not heard from the teacher, be sure to contact him/her 24 hours before the conference.
- Arrange for a baby-sitter for younger siblings or sign up for child care with the school.
- Make a list of questions and concerns.
- Review the Parent Checklist for Student-Led Conferences that you will receive. It lists steps to follow for a productive and meaningful conference.

On Conference Day:

- Make sure your child comes with you to the conference.
- Arrive on time.
- Take notes during the conference.
- Ask for clarification on things you do not understand.
- If you cannot make the scheduled conference time, please call to reschedule.

After the Conference:

- If you still have questions and concerns, set up an appointment to meet with the teacher on another date.
- Fill out the Parent Evaluation of Student-Led Conferences Form.
- Go to the cafeteria to review more of your child's work and to visit with the counselors.

Teachers

Goals of Student-Led Conferences:

- To encourage students to accept responsibility for their learning.
- To teach students to evaluate their academic performance.
- To engage the parent, the student, and the teacher in honest dialogue.
- To increase parent participation at conference time.

Teacher Responsibilities:

Most of the teacher's responsibilities occur before the student-led conference takes place. The following is a list of things that teachers should do prior to the conference.

- Train students on student-led conferencing. The teacher should role play with the student on how a student-led conference should be conducted.
- Give all students time to practice. The more practice they have, the more confident they will be during the conference.
- Provide ample time for students to get their folders and notebooks together before the conference.
- Notify parents of the new conferencing format. The parents should know that their child will be leading the conference. Send home the parent handout on student-led conferences.
- Be sure to send a Confirmation Form home to the parents within 24 hours of the conference.
- Each team will complete the Time Schedule Form for confirmed conference times.

During the Conference:

- Refer to the Teacher Suggestions on the Conference Form. It emphasizes that teachers **do not talk!**
- Encourage the student to keep focused on his or her checklist.
- When you have conversation, be positive and supportive, emphasizing the things the student has accomplished. Keep focused on the Standards.
- Remind parents to go to the cafeteria to review more of their student's work after the conference.
- Encourage parents to fill out Evaluation forms.

After the Conference:

1. Were my students prepared?
2. Was I positive with the parents?
3. Did I think the conferences were effective?
4. What might I have done differently?
5. Was it worth the time and preparation?

Form A

Teacher Evaluation Checklist for Conference

Teacher Evaluation Checklist for Conference

Student Name: _____

Class: _____

Teacher: _____

Date: _____

1. Student is meeting academic standards. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

2. Student is organized; uses agenda. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

3. Student works well with peers. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

4. Student is current with all assignments. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

5. Student is comes prepared each day. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

6. Student behavior is acceptable. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

7. Student attendance is good. Low-----High
1 2 3 4 5

Form D

Student Self-Evaluation for Conference

Student Self-Evaluation for Conference

1. Class:

Teacher:

2. Class:

Teacher:

3. Class:

Teacher:

4. Class:

Teacher:

5. Class:

Teacher:

6. Class:

Teacher:

For the next grading period, my self-improvement plan includes these goals:

1. _____

2. _____

Form E

Student Checklist for Conference

Student Checklist for Conference

- _____ Show your agenda to your parents. Discuss which standards you have mastered.**
- _____ Review the self-evaluation sheet on top of your conference folder. Explain your evaluation in each class.**
- _____ Discuss your self-improvement plan and the goals which you have set for yourself.**
- _____ Share at least one piece of work with your parents. Briefly explain how you met the standard or are still working on it.**
- _____ Indicate to the teacher that you are ready for them to join you to complete the conference.**
- _____ Take your parents to the cafeteria and finish reviewing your work. Remind your parents to fill out the evaluation form.**
- _____ After leaving the cafeteria, place all of your folders in your locker.**

Form F

Parent Checklist for Student-Led Conferences

Parent Checklist for Student-Led Conferences

- ✓ **Check your child's agenda. It contains information about Standards met and daily assignments.**
- ✓ **Review your child's self-evaluation sheet. Ask questions of your child if you don't understand something.**
- ✓ **Let your child discuss their self-improvement plan with you. Encourage them to reach their goals!**
- ✓ **You should review your child's work during the conference. Ask your student which Standards were being used for the assignment. Ask your child if they thought they had mastered those Standards.**
- ✓ **After your child has led you and the teacher through the conference, the teacher will answer any questions you might have.**
- ✓ **Please go to the cafeteria to complete the review of your child's work. Fill out both evaluation forms as you leave. Additional student services are available in the cafeteria if needed.**

